

## **Critical Question #2 – Is Melbourne Fair?**

I believe that, generally and presently, Melbourne is a fair place. This can be seen through it's justice system, the freedom of speech, equality for beliefs and rights, public services and support throughout the community. The definition of fairness is 'treating people equally without favouritism or discrimination.' The definition of equality is 'the state of being equal, especially in status, rights or opportunities.'

Both these things can be seen and possibly lacking in many areas of Melbourne.

Firstly, regarding the justice system and how they deal with criminals, I believe is quite fair. Witnessing trials take place in the Magistrate's Court I can clearly see, that many things are taken into account when placing a sentence. Sentences when given were also quite fair and reasonable and no personal feelings were put into or effecting the sentences from the judge. Many of the sentences were like these however, while at the courts I did stumble across one strange case. Here, a man had badly injured another at a local bar and a police officer was appealing for an exclusion order. The appeal was denied because the victim did not personally complain and the offender had no past record despite the fact that the offender had apparently attacked the victim for no reason and had not taken any alcohol that night. This made me question a bit of what goes on in a judge's mind when these serious decisions are made. So far, Melbourne was looking pretty fair and just a tiny bit unfair.

Secondly, also regarding the justice system, we went and visited the Old Melbourne Gaol, where we saw how prisoners were treated, what kind of crimes they were imprisoned for and the quality of life in prison. Here, I found out horrible things about Melbourne's past with "criminals". I discovered that prisoners slept on a cold hard floor with no mats in a room barely big enough for a person, that prisoners had only 1 hour a day for exercise which was basically just walking up and down and that the imprisonment reasons for some of these supposed criminals was a load of crap. The guide at the gaol told us that people, no matter the age, could just be standing on the side of a road with no money and an officer could just come up to you and put you away behind bars without a trial. This really shocked me because so far, Melbourne seemed like the ideal place with fair laws, rights and punishments but here, it was clearly not.

While in the gaol, prisoners were not allowed to talk or see one another and were forced to wear these strange cloth masks as they exited their cells. These cloths made it difficult to breath and the poor hygiene conditions did not make it any easier.

Punishments here were as bad as a hanging and as little as a whipping which caused life long scars and raw cuts about 2 inches deep for something as little as just speaking out of line.

Knowing that right now I could've been put in to Old Melbourne Gaol for not having money; Past Melbourne was not looking fair at all.

One aspect that contributes to the fairness of present day Melbourne would be the freedom of religious beliefs and equality among the community. Melbourne provides melburnians with diversity and the right to choose your beliefs without discrimination affecting you. After researching these parts of Melbourne I truly believe that it has allowed Melbourne to become more

diverse and accepting. Overall I do believe that our system and the freedom that we are given in Melbourne does argue a very strong point for fairness in Melbourne.

To conclude, based on the arguments written, I believe that present day Melbourne is one of the fairest to find and that its functioning justice system and the freedom given to Melbourneians is important here. Melbourne however, as seen while exploring the Old Melbourne Gaol, was not always fair, it was actually very unfair and a cruel place. Despite all this history Melbourne, to me, is very fair but there is always room to improve.

Resources:

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/fair>

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/equality>

<http://www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au/>

<http://www.fairtrials.org/about-us/the-right-to-a-fair>

Trails and class discussions